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Suggestions for the effective use of the dialog in audiolingual language classes include descriptions of (1) planned preliminary activities, (2) method of presenting and drilling dialog lines, and (3) the instructional potential of mastered material. Significant emphasis is placed on practices advocated by Gaarder. (AF)

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THE ART OF DIALOGUE TEACHING

For the past decade the dialogue has been the starting point of each lesson for most audio-lingually oriented texts. For the past decade too, the use of the dialogue as a means of presenting the corpus of language to be studied in each lesson has been the object of much discussion and debate. In the hands of a competent teacher who understands the purpose behind its use, a well constructed dialogue is an invaluable tool. If properly handled, dialogue teaching should not be subject to these criticisms which are so frequently heard: 1) students who have memorized dialogues are not learning the language, but only a series of sentences which they repeat automatically with only a vague understanding of their meaning, 2) because of the rote learning involved, students can only recall and use these sentences in the context of the dialogue itself and are not able to adapt them, vary them, and put them to use in other contexts, and 3) students who are tied to dialogue learning cannot create authentic sentences even within the range of linguistic competency that the dialogue material should have prepared them for.

Many of the above criticisms are good descriptions of present day language learners, not because of dialogues themselves (for a dialogue is only a tool), but because of the way in which dialogue teaching has proceeded. For many teachers the dialogue is that conversation at the beginning of each lesson which has to be committed to memory and recited before one can go on about the business of pattern drills and grammar generalizations. Too many teachers treat the dialogue this way and think that once it is memorized, their work with it is finished. It is the work that is done with the dialogue material while it is being learned and after it has been memorized that constitutes real language learning. The dialogue is not a play with a certain cast of characters and a particular setting to be acted out in a rote fashion for the sake of memorizing set sentences in a script. The dialogue is used only to provide a base in which to introduce the spoken language we want the student to be able to use in any situation whenever the need arises.

According to A. Bruce Gaarder, what is called for to achieve this objective, "is a thorough systematic teacher-directed audio-lingual analysis of each portion of the student's foreign language life experience." (*Foreign Language Annals,* Dec. 1967, p. 112) Mr. Gaarder clarifies this process in the following description:

> "The analysis, elicited from the learners by a combination of questions commands, and directed dialogue techniques, concentrates on the dramatic situation, interpersonal events and interrelationships: on meaning. It focuses on the natural logic of events and situations. By isolating and focusing the student's attention successively on every possi-

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ble relationship, every fact, implication and assumption in relation to all others, all of the grammatical relationships are necessarily covered. Necessarily too the depth and coverage of the analysis are limited by the student's linguistic life experience up to that point." (p. 112).

Essentially I agree with Mr. Gaarder's recommendations, but because of a number of points of difference as to how these recommendations should be put into action, rather than reviewing the techniques he offers to illustrate the analysis he suggests, I will present my own version and indicate how it differs from his.

Preliminary Activities

Because the dialogue almost always appears on the first page of each lesson it is generally accepted that the learning of this material is the first order of business in each new unit. Much of the analysis that Gaarder pleads for can be begun before the dialogue teaching has started through certain preliminary activities that will also pave the way for a smoother meaning analysis once the dialogue has been memorized. As with any new material that is about to be presented to students, if there is a period of preparation in which students are made ready and more receptive to the material, the learning proceeds faster and in a more meaningful way. Therefore, before the first line of the dialogue is ever introduced, new vocabulary should be taught and practiced in lexical drills and question and answer exercises; the characters in the dialogue should be given not only some flesh and bones so that they become physical realities, but also personalities with which the students can identify; and the various situations which develop in the dialogue should be described and brought down to a personal level for each student. All of these preliminary activities are conducted in the foreign language and may be treated simultaneously, i.e. new vocabulary is taught as characters and situations are being introduced and described.

The question of how to conduct these activities presents itself, and an example is in order. Let us take the basic dialogue of Unit 6 of the *Audio-Lingual Materials* Level One French as an illustration. Briefly the dialogue can be summarized in these two sentences: Pierre telephones Bernard and asks him to go to the movies. The latter emphatically declines the invitation, since he has seen enough movies lately, and the two settle on a car ride. What do we know about Pierre in this dialogue that we can use to introduce him and make him a real person? We know his name. We know that he has a friend named Bernard whom he calls and goes places with. We know that he is well-mannered, since he identifies himself and properly greets Bernard's mother who answers the phone. We know that he likes to go to the movies. We know that his father has a car which he is allowed to drive. We know that he doesn't have much money and that he is probably counting on his friend, Bernard, for a little financial support. Sentences in the foreign language describing Pierre are repeated and used to introduce new vocabulary items. Questions and drills are used to get students to manipulate the material and to determine their comprehension.

One of the three situations that has to be developed in this same dialogue is the telephone situation. Students who simply memorize the dialogue lines may do so quite obediently without ever realizing exactly what the dialogue lines are showing them how to do. In this dialogue, for example, the situation would indicate to students how to ask for a number, how to inquire about who is calling, how to greet a person on the phone, how to identify oneself, and how to ask for the desired party. Memorizing dialogue lines which convey this information does not insure that students will understand and use the skills in question in other similar situations. Therefore, the situation itself has to be isolated, and the skills needed to function in that situation have to be taught. Before these lines of the dialogue are taught, a toy telephone is brought to class. Students are taught

the utterances needed to perform the skills listed above. Students are given the opportunity to vary the situation according to telephone numbers and the parties talking.

The preliminary activities described in the above paragraphs take time to develop, but it is not added or wasted time, since this introduction contributes to better understanding of the material and therefore to more rapid mastery of the lines themselves.

Drilling the Lines

Presenting and drilling dialogue lines is largely a matter of backward build-up and repetition, but once a certain facility to say the lines, still below the level of memorization, has been reached, many more practice techniques must be introduced. Many of the retelling, paraphrase, and recapitulation procedures that Gaarder includes in the meaning analysis process that takes place after dialogue memorization, should be, in the opinion of this author, an on-going process that takes place during dialogue learning, not after, and therefore facilitates learning. Students should be asked to repeat lines in order and out of order. They should be asked to give appropriate rejoinders and answers to questions, but they should also be made to supply appropriate questions and lead statements to given answers and rejoinders. With the presentation of every new section of dialogue should be questions and directed dialogue activities as aids to learning. Questions on the dialogue and directed dialogue activities do not have to be delayed until the entire dialogue has been presented or until it has been memorized. These techniques should be used to help the students master the material. Students should be asked to reconstruct sentences from key words and groups of words that are given as cues. They should be asked to identify who says what as they are learning the sentences. They should be asked to make substitutions in the basic dialogue sentences using familiar vocabulary and recognize substitutions made by the teacher and then restore sentences to original forms.

Endless repetition of dialogue lines to the point of memorization often defeats the very purposes we are striving to achieve. Unless the memorization process is founded on a base of solid understanding made possible by some of the techniques described above, the dialogue will never serve its purpose. Each line of the dialogue should be developed and expanded to the point of perfect understanding and easy adaptation as one proceeds.

Beyond the Dialogue

Once the dialogue is fairly well in hand, the student's real use of this tool is exploited. One of the first tasks at hand is to take various sections of the dialogue and replay them in different situations which require substitutions in the vocabulary items while the basic structures and reactions semain the same. For example in the Unit 6 dialogue already mentioned we have this section of dialogue:

Pierre: Veux-tu aller en ville?
Bernard: Qu'est-ce que tu as l'intention de faire?
Pierre: J'ai envie d'aller au cinéma. Pas toi?
Bernard: Ah, non! Encore le cinéma? J'en ai assez.
(*A-LM Level One French* p. 45)

As an exploitation exercise, students are asked to react in the same way that Bernard does in the above two lines he speaks, but to make all necessary changes according to the substitutions they hear. The four examples below are only a few of the possibilities that exist even after only five lessons of study:

Veux-tu aller à la bibliothèque?
Qu'est-ce que tu as l'intention de faire?
J'ai envie de chercher un bon roman. Pas toi?
Ah, non! Encore les romans. J'en ai assez!

Veux-tu aller manger?
Qu'est-ce que tu as l'intention de prendre?

J'ai envie de prendre des saucisses.
Ah, non! Encore des saucisses. J'en ai assez.

Veux-tu aller chez Philippe avec moi?
Qu'est-ce que tu as l'intention de faire?
J.ai envie d'écouter ses disques? Pas toi?
Ah, non! Encore ses disques? J'en ai assez.

Veux-tu me garder cette place?
Qu'est-ce que tu as l'intention de faire?
Je vais à la fenêtre regarder cette blonde qui passe.
Ah, non! Encore cette blonde! J'en ai assez.

As a final stage in the meaning analysis that Gaarder presents, there is a "focusing on implication and assumptions" and conjectures that can be made about the dialogue. I believe wholeheartedly that even at the most elementary level the student must be led to react critically and creatively to the language material that he is learning. This can be done within the limitations of the linguistic resources that even beginning students have at their disposal in the foreign language. However, the example that Gaarder provides is far from convincing. Based on a dialog-narrative that he describes as representing "a point somewhere in the first semester of a basic course," (p. 113) he offers a number of questions and expected answers as samples that could be used to determine students' ability to make implications, assumptions, and conjectures about the dialogue material, most of which are much beyond the level of difficulty represented by the dialogue. Below are a sample question and answer:

Question: ¿Inés reconoció en seguida la voz de María?

Expected answer: No, si la hubiera reconocido en seguida no hubiera preguntado "¿De parte de quién?"

Most first semester students have had little exposure to compound tenses, much less subjunctive forms. This does not mean that what Mr. Gaarder is talking about cannot be done. It can be done. Indeed, it must be done. But certainly we cannot expect students suddenly to begin using forms that we have not even introduced. Nor is it reasonable to think that we must stop and teach a certain structure just so the student will be able to make assumptions and conjectures on the dialogue material. All of this has to be done with the language equipment that the student has at that point.

To illustrate the possibility of this kind of activity with beginning students in the language after only 3 or 4 units of study, let us again summarize a dialogue situation. In the 4th dialogue of the *Audio-Lingual Materials* we have the situation in which Paul asks Jeanne to go over to Philippe's to listen to records after school. Jeanne agrees and asks Paul to wait for her at the door. And what is she doing while he is waiting there for her? This, of course is not in the dialogue. But it is something about which students are able to make conjectures, and the question can be asked simply in language that the students will understand: *Paul attend Jeanne à la porte. Pourquoi?* (a word that appears in the same lesson) *Que fait Jeanne?* Here are some of the answers that I've gotten from my students: *Elle n'a pas son cahier, Elle cherche une amie, Il faut qu'elle aille chercher un livre à la bibliothèque*—I even got this answer once: *Elle donne un coup de téléphone à sa mère!* This was not an information question, but an inference question asking the students to think about possibilities and make conjectures. The answers that were given were correct, because the students had been taught to rely upon the corpus of language in which they had developed competency, and not to "create" beyond this level. Yet the students were able to interpret an inference question and provide simple, yet suitable answers. There is no reason why this cannot be done with all the dialogues.

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